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14. ABSTRACT The operational commander answers to two masters. Those below him deserve the full weight of his combat savvy, the full measure of his devotion to their cause, and the full strength of the United States' national will unleashed through military force. Those above him deserve his leadership, guidance and advice. Those above him also owe him something in return: a clear definition of precisely what the mission is, the means to accomplish it, and honest explication of why it is worthy of the sacrifice of the Republic's greatest treasure. The successful operational commander – Ulysses S. Grant and Matthew Ridgway are examples – has both the driving talent to win a synchronized total war, and the full faith and measure of the President – Lincoln and Truman, here – to do so. Those operational commanders who fail, no matter how talented, often do so in opaque wars because of uncertain, ill-defined missions demanded of them by those above. General David Petraeus is such a commander, but Iraq is such a war. No matter his military success, General Petraeus has been placed in a situation in Iraq in which he cannot win, because the President has not given him a strategic end state to achieve. Battlefield victories notwithstanding, General Petraeus will leave behind a failed state. The American success, followed by the American failure, in Iraq clarifies the operational art.					
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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE  
Newport, R.I.**

**Tell Me How This Ends**

**by**

**Stanton S. Coerr**

**Lieutenant Colonel U.S. Marines**

**A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.**

**The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.**

**Signature: \_\_\_\_\_**

**6 November 2007**

## **Abstract**

Tell me how this ends.

Lieutenant General David Petraeus, March 2003, Iraq

The operational commander answers to two masters. Those below him deserve the full weight of his combat savvy, the full measure of his devotion to their cause, and the full strength of the United States' national will unleashed through military force. Those above him deserve his leadership, guidance and advice. Those above him also owe him something in return: a clear definition of precisely what the mission is, the means to accomplish it, and honest explication of why it is worthy of the sacrifice of the Republic's greatest treasure. The successful operational commander – Ulysses S. Grant and Matthew Ridgway are examples – has both the driving talent to win a synchronized total war, and the full faith and measure of the President – Lincoln and Truman, here – to do so. Those operational commanders who fail, no matter how talented, often do so in opaque wars because of uncertain, ill-defined missions demanded of them by those above. General David Petraeus is such a commander, but Iraq is such a war. No matter his military success, General Petraeus has been placed in a situation in Iraq in which he cannot win, because the President has not given him a strategic end state to achieve. Battlefield victories notwithstanding, General Petraeus will leave behind a failed state. The American success, followed by the American failure, in Iraq clarifies the operational art.

Policy always dominates strategy. In determining strategic objectives, political leadership should always ask for advice of military leadership. At the same time, the military must have sufficient room to accomplish the strategic objectives determined by the political leadership...the operational artist must be skillful in translating political direction into attainable military objectives.

Milan Vego, *Operational Warfare*<sup>1</sup>

Operational art, properly exercised and thus unfettered, allows the operational commander to give battle at the time and place of his choosing, yielding victories at the tactical level, building to operational success, giving on to strategic military goals to achieve objectives at all three levels and yielding the national strategic endstate. A focus on the particulars – logistics, his forces' morale, enemy strategy, maneuver room, and so on – must combine with a wide-angle view of the battlefield and relentless, flexible, driving synchronization of all his combat power. The successful operational commander is guided by, but unconstrained by, those civilians to whom he answers, for only when he is free from looking over his shoulder can he allow his subordinates the tactical flexibility they need. Operational art breaks down when civilian leadership allows political or strategic goals to eclipse theater realities. Vego points out that

...operational commanders must not have a narrow, tactical perspective in the performance of their duties in time of war. To be fully successful, they must possess a much broader perspective on all aspects of the situation – political, diplomatic, military, economic, informational, and others – or what is arbitrarily called “operational perspective.” All three components of military art – strategy, tactics, and operational art – must be in harmony.<sup>2</sup>

General Ulysses S. Grant was such a multifaceted commander, and in his relationship with Abraham Lincoln cultivated a crisp, healthy respect which allowed him freedom of action and led to the preservation of the Republic. His opponent, Robert E. Lee, was fighting in equally full measure, but culminated in 1864, unable to achieve his operational objective

for his commander in chief's national strategic end state. More than 80 years later, President Harry Truman gave command of the collapsing Eighth Army in Korea to General Matthew Ridgway, who took command, reversed failure, and restored operational balance with national policy. Grant and Ridgway, and Lincoln and Truman, are examples of how the operational art should be exercised, and show American dexterity in conventional war.

The counterinsurgency in Vietnam was our first loss in a theater war; the counterinsurgency in Iraq is our second. General David Petraeus fears handing over Iraq, anticipating a failed state, unconvinced of the White House's insistence that "inside every Iraqi is an American waiting to jump out."<sup>3</sup> Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, writ large, is a prism through which to view the exercise of the operational art. In 2003, Phases I through III were brilliant, synchronized conventional success by operational commanders given clear and crisp direction from above. This success segued into a collapse of strategy in Phase IV, as Iraq descended into an insurgent maelstrom, demonstrating the failure imminent when commanders are given opaque policy vagaries as mission.

George Bush has clarified the *means* of American withdrawal from Iraq, *but has defined neither the ends at stake nor the endstate his operational commander is to accomplish*. The White House, focused on withdrawal, has instead limited the operational commander in Iraq, preventing him from exercising the "application of creative imagination" which the operational art prescribes. General Petraeus cannot exercise this operational art, because, beyond a vague mandate to defeat terrorism and withdraw American forces, the national strategic end state is not defined. Without an end state, General Petraeus cannot create objectives. Without objectives, he cannot win.

General Petraeus thus finds himself in a counterinsurgency fight with no end – certainly no victory – in sight. The “tyranny of short time horizons”<sup>4</sup> has forced this modern operational commander into an untenable position: fighting an insurgency he cannot defeat, fielding questions from subordinate commanders he cannot answer, for policy from above which he does not understand. He must insist that Bush clarify that policy, or he must resign.

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**“WHAT REMAINS TO DO IN THE EXISTING GREAT STRUGGLE”<sup>5</sup>**

**ULYSSES S. GRANT**

To allow freedom of action for subordinates, the operational commander must first obtain maximum freedom of action for himself from the national leadership.

Milan Vego, *Operational Warfare*<sup>6</sup>

In March of 1864, Ulysses S. Grant was promoted to Lieutenant General (the first officer since George Washington to hold that rank) and took command of the Union Army. Abraham Lincoln had grown tired of petulant, indecisive leadership from his operational commanders (in turn Hooker, Burnside, Pope, McClellan, and Halleck) declaring that “if the military commanders in the field cannot be successful, myself being master of them cannot be but a failure.”<sup>7</sup> These Union generals were focused on not losing, rather than winning. Their emphasis on Napoleonic battle was straight-ahead, West Point-style thinking, but blinded them to Lincoln’s national strategic end state: reuniting the Union. Lincoln was doing his part, but his generals were failing in theirs.

The Union was grown tired of war, but her citizens buckled down, following the example of Lincoln in his determination to hold the Republic together. Abraham Lincoln needed complete victory, but not at any cost. He could not have a long war resulting in a devastated South, and he could not have an occupying army fighting endless guerrilla war. Lincoln needed a swift, decisive leader to replace the timid, uncertain Halleck...and he

turned to the hero of Vicksburg. Grant had never met President Lincoln before the day he was summoned to the White House to take command, but liked him immediately, realizing that

all he wanted or had ever wanted was someone who would *take the responsibility and act*, leaving to Lincoln the task of mobilizing all the power of the government. Mr. Lincoln gained influence over men by making them feel that it was a pleasure to serve him. He preferred yielding, rather than insist upon having his own way. Mr. Lincoln was not timid, *and he was willing to trust his generals in making and executing their plans.*<sup>8</sup>

Neither was Grant timid, declaring that “if we have to fight, I would like to do it all at once and then make friends.”<sup>9</sup> He and President Lincoln agreed on the most fundamental of war aims: the execution of total war. Grant had the forces, a genius for engineering and logistics, and a well-honed combat savvy. Lincoln had the will and an unusually keen sense of how much war the nation could take. He understood that Grant could not extend operational logistics through the South for long, and he understood that once Union generals took a city on hostile ground, they had to leave men behind to defend it while the rest of the Army moved onward. The two men approached this war, and the *idea* of war, from different angles, as a reflective Grant later observed:

(Lincoln) always showed a generous and kindly spirit toward the Southern people...he was ready to hand them a blank sheet of paper with his signature attached for them to fill in the terms upon which they would be willing to live with us in the Union and be one people. He thought blood enough had been spilled to atone for our wickedness as a nation. From the first, I was firm in the conviction that no peace could be had...until the military power of the rebellion was entirely broken. I therefore determined to use the greatest number of troops practicable against the armed force of the enemy, to hammer continuously against the armed force of the enemy and his resources, until by mere attrition, if in no other way, there should be nothing left to him but submission to the constitution.<sup>10</sup>

Ulysses S. Grant was thus able to focus on Lee’s army, *not on the terrain it held*, and his focus on this operational objective - Lee’s operational center of gravity, the Army of

Northern Virginia – would lead, clearly and directly, to *Lincoln's national strategic end state: reunite the Union*. Grant could not have a stalemate, could not fight Lee to a draw, could not have a negotiated settlement, and dared not leave a restive, armed South behind, ready to stand up again once Grant's army receded. Grant needed complete victory over Lee's army in the field, and thus a warning to the people for whom Lee's men fought. This is total war.

General Robert E. Lee needed time. The high spirit of spring 1862, when Lee was flush with men and taking the fight to the North, seemed distant. He could no longer project power, could not maneuver as he wished. By the spring of 1864, the Confederacy was collapsing, their supply of men waning, the people as exhausted by war as were their Yankee counterparts, reeling from simultaneous defeats the previous summer at Vicksburg and Gettysburg, unnerved by Antietam. Thus did Lee back into a flexible defense in Virginia that spring: out of space, out of time, and running out of force. He was trading space away, circling in on himself, his back against his beloved Richmond, coiling the Confederate force, hoping somehow for more men.

Lee knew, as he had from the beginning, that decisive victory in the North was his only route to operational success (he, too, was a West Point man.) He simply did not have the men, the spirit, or the national will to carry the fight forward. Confederate President Jefferson Davis, responding to a terrified populace which was accustomed to armed protection and heard the Union Army coming, insisted that Confederate soldiers be spread throughout the South, depriving Lee of the mass he needed to fight the war he wanted. The people and men of the Confederacy, though failing, separated their leader from their loss:

Soldiers were reverently silent in the presence of Lee. His spirit pervaded and



dominated every rank, grade and arm of the service. The strategy was always his. When corps command was weak, his likewise had to be the tactics.<sup>11</sup>

As the winter of 1863-1864 receded, the ground dried and hardened, and Lee waited in the Wilderness near Richmond, like a wounded animal, still dangerous. Abandoning his Jominian view of war - interior and exterior lines, breastworks, fortifications, orderly lines of communication – Grant reshaped the Union Army. *With the blessings of Lincoln*, he eliminated superfluous departments of administration, pulling troops from garrison and fortress duty, focusing his men on the operational objective he would pursue. Lincoln, to his part, created a new military advisor, to be called a Chief of Staff, and thus lifted the burden of administration from Grant, and so “instead of being snowed under by paperwork, the lieutenant general could give his full attention to strategic planning, and this he did.” When he took command from Halleck, Grant had one Union soldier in garrison for each Union soldier carrying a musket in the field; when Grant was finished imposing his will, the ratio was one to two.<sup>12</sup> He was less successful at ridding himself of deadweight generals and horseholders, but shrugged, focused, and went to war.

When Grant began his campaign in May 1864, he faced a counterinsurgency war which presaged those to come in Vietnam and Iraq. In conventional force, Grant and Lee were on roughly equal footing. Ominous to Grant, though, were the “many bands of guerrillas and a large population disloyal” in the South, in and around and behind his lines. Lee’s force was multiplied by the simple fact that Southerners were fighting on Southern soil, against what they viewed as an occupying army, while Grant was forward deployed on hostile ground. Sherman put it to Grant, simply: we are not fighting an army, but a people. Jefferson Davis’s “reign of military despotism, which made every man and boy... a soldier,

enabled the enemy to bring almost his entire strength to the field.”<sup>13</sup> Thus were two nations, inside one border, fighting total war.

Grant, living up to his reputation for daring honed at Vicksburg and Chattanooga, proposed a three-pronged assault on Lee’s army. Lincoln swiftly approved it, ignoring the details. Bold, newly-promoted Sherman would take three armies combined and “go into the interior of the enemy’s country as far as he could, inflicting all the damage he could upon their war resources,”<sup>14</sup> splitting the Confederacy, keeping supplies from enemy hands and (more important) making the Southern people “feel the hard hand of war.” Butler would go north against Richmond proper. Grant himself would go south, headlong, into the Army of Northern Virginia to drive Lee back to Richmond. Grant thus came into his campaign endgame building momentum and strength in space, force and time, the weight of the nation behind him. Grant was given free run of his command, Lincoln supporting him, both men clear in their roles, as Lincoln observed:

The particulars of (Grant’s) plan I neither know nor wish to know. Grant is the first *general* I have had. I am glad to find a man who can go ahead without me.<sup>15</sup>

Total war joined, Lincoln never lost faith. Grant piled Union bodies four-deep at Cold Harbor, by the end of the six-week Wilderness campaign losing 30,000 men on the Union side alone in one of the great mistakes of American military history. Lincoln kept that faith even as those mangled Cold Harbor corpses and horribly wounded returned to Washington through May and June of 1864. Lincoln stood behind his commander, sending a message: “I begin to see it. You will succeed. God bless you all.”<sup>16</sup>

Grant needed Southern insurgents imprisoned without trial; Lincoln extended his suspension of the writ of habeas corpus. Grant needed the South controlled behind him as he

moved; Lincoln declared martial law in trace of the advancing Union Army. Grant needed more men; on May 17, 1864, Lincoln ordered a new draft for 300,000. Grant focused on the war, Lincoln on the nation.

The President understood that victory required full national will, and Lincoln relied on his operational commander to use that will to push the Confederacy past the tipping point. Lee, dug in, desperate, his back foot in the heart of his beloved Virginia, fought hard, standing firm at Petersburg. But he had nothing left as he prepared to fall back to Richmond, and he knew that once he entered the city he would lose, with nowhere else to go. Grant again asked for more troops for his final push through Virginia, and again Lincoln acceded, saying,

in my opinion there ought to be an immediate call for new men to be put in the field in the shortest possible time. *The enemy now have their last man in the field.* Every depletion of their army is an irreparable loss. The greater number of men we have, the shorter will be the war.<sup>17</sup>

*Lincoln understood that the Confederacy had culminated.* Grant continued toward Richmond, Sherman to his south, then east, then north to the North Carolina coast, pushing to meet Grant and draw the noose tight, driving a spike through the Confederacy. The Confederacy collapsed that summer, spent and defeated, though Lee fought on in a losing campaign until Palm Sunday of 1865. The Union, in the end, survived, under the hand of a firm commander, firmly guided.

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**“BRILLIANT, DRIVING, UNCOMPROMISING LEADERSHIP”<sup>18</sup>**

**MATTHEW RIDGWAY**

In December 1950, U.S. forces engaged in war in Korea were being mauled. Entire divisions had been reduced to combat-ineffective status, the Marines had just retreated from the Chosin Reservoir, Americans were encircled and retreating from Seoul and Inchon, and

the Red Chinese, “sprung suddenly from beyond the Yalu,”<sup>19</sup> were slaving at the border preparing to enter the fight. Secretary of State General George Catlett Marshall admitted that Americans were “at their lowest point.”<sup>20</sup> Like Lincoln turning to his warrior, so did President Harry Truman look for a man to take charge after the death of the Eighth Army commander. General Matthew Ridgway swiftly was warned, summoned, briefed, and sent.

Equally swiftly, Ridgway established his relationship with his commander. Though noting that “we still find political leaders forlornly hoping that we can defend ourselves, save ourselves, by choosing what appears to be the easiest, cheapest way,”<sup>21</sup> he trusted Truman, and Truman trusted him. Perhaps they were united in silent fuming at the man between them, Douglas MacArthur. It is startling that Ridgway himself, upon his taking command, could not answer the most fundamental of his exhausted, freezing, terrified soldiers’ questions: “That question was simply this: what in the hell are we doing here?”<sup>22</sup>

Ridgway found Eighth Army in disarray: bloodied, broken, dispirited, uncertain. Arriving to command in the frigid Korean winter, Ridgway set the tone from his first question to theater commander MacArthur: “General...do I have your permission to attack?”<sup>23</sup> Always, Ridgway kept his operational objective in mind: the North Korean and Chinese operational centers of gravity were their armies in the field. With this new fighting spirit infusing the ranks, Secretary Marshall noted approvingly that “Eighth Army in good shape and improving daily under Ridgway’s leadership.”<sup>24</sup>

The enemy was north of the 38<sup>th</sup> Parallel, so that is where Ridgway went. Ridgway wanted ten more battalions of field artillery; Truman gave them to him. Ridgway wanted more men; he got those too, his force swelling to 365,000. Ridgway used operational maneuver with daring, large-unit movements against an enemy nearly a half-million strong,

maneuvering divisions like regiments, and regiments like platoons. He used bold operational logistics to sustain a driving, moving machine rolling inexorably northward. He used “the really terrifying strength”<sup>25</sup> of American firepower to make up for his lack of force in raw numbers. His demand for the tough basics of soldiering from the men of the Eighth Army was matched by his concern for them. Ridgway’s insistence on better food, hot meals in the dark of winter, better MASH units with first-rate care - and his personal appearances across the front, popping up in an uncovered jeep to say hello and show his love for his men - invested those soldiers with esprit they had lost. Ridgway, like both Lee and Grant before him, understood the morale intangible of the force matrix, and it served him well.

Harry Truman was not a popular President. The modern view of Truman as a plain-spoken hero, the quaint recollections of “Give ’Em Hell, Harry!,” is revision; such fond sentiment was not shared by the American people of 1951 as their sons were butchered in Asia. Americans had never quite believed that this bumpkin behind the owlsh glasses had the wherewithal to fill the dauntingly large shoes of the gifted Franklin Roosevelt. In March they proved it, showing their disdain in a Gallup Poll giving Truman 26% approval<sup>26</sup>, the lowest approval ratings for any President before or since...until George W. Bush.

Truman had no political capital to spend, no goodwill to burn, no Capitol Hill leverage. But Truman threatened, begged, and sacrificed whatever he had; giving up hope of Presidential success elsewhere, he gave his field commander what he needed. Truman, himself once an Army man overseas in a strange country to fight total war, felt, deep down, that what his operational commander in the field was doing was more important than anything happening in Washington. Ridgway knew this, and as an operational commander he led down...but he knew the strength of his command came from those above him. He

understood both what Truman wanted - the *national strategic end state was that Communism would stop, there, then, in Korea* – and what Truman needed: truth, beyond MacArthur's bluster, about what was happening on the ground:

*Ridgway both understood and approved of the administration's policy. Not only did he admire Harry Truman, he thought Truman a great and courageous man. In Washington, every inclination now was to look 'beyond MacArthur' to Ridgway for reliable military judgments. Until now Washington had been almost entirely dependent upon MacArthur's own opinions, his strategy. Now all that was over...With the Eighth Army on the offensive again, morale in Washington was revived. While General MacArthur was fighting the Pentagon, General Ridgway was fighting the enemy.*<sup>27</sup>

The Eighth Army's retreat continued to the Han, slowed, stopped, and then reversed, and by the end of January 1951 the Americans were on the move...this time, on the offense, building combat power and synchronizing those Truman-sent green arrivals from the States throughout the spring, crossing the Parallel in March. Ridgway put entire corps on the march, entire divisions into the rear of the North Koreans, artillery in support and aviation overhead. Ridgway got his Army off the roads, emphasizing speed and mobility and communications. Fighting spirit had returned. Support from above clear and unstinting, Ridgway turned it around.

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## **AFTER THE WAR, BUT BEFORE THE PEACE**

### **DAVID PETRAEUS**

One should never go to war without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it.

Carl von Clausewitz

The 2003 coalition invasion of Iraq, IRAQI FREEDOM Phases I through III, were total war, with a very clear strategic and operational objective and a brilliant tactical, operational and strategic success. Commanders on the ground were boresighted, as ever-

impolitic Marine Brigadier General James Mattis briefed his commanders in Kuwait in February of that year:

There is one way for any of you to have a short but exciting conversation with me, and that is to move too slow (sic.) This is not a marathon, this is a sprint. In about a month, I am going to go forward of our Marines up to the border between Iraq and Kuwait. And when I get there, one of two things is going to happen. Either the commander of the Iraqi 51<sup>st</sup> Mechanized Division is going to surrender his army in the field to me, or he and all his guys are going to die.”<sup>28</sup>

American tactical commanders, operational commanders, and strategic leadership were united, clear and in constant communication on the *national strategic end state* which would hinge upon the *operational and strategic objective: destroying the Saddam Hussein regime*.

Like Grant in 1864, like Ridgway in 1950, they focused on the mission, not the plan. Like Ridgway and Grant, these operational commanders traded back and forth between force and time, maximizing space, moving quickly and in unexpected ways. And like Grant and Ridgway, operational commanders in Iraq had the full backing of the President, a clear strategic end state on which to build intermediate operational objectives, and the full weight of American national will, clear-eyed on what the war would require, behind them. In a 500-page after-action report, Army writers reflected on unleashing of war:

America’s strategic goal was embedded in the President’s numerous addresses – establish a free, democratic, prosperous and nonthreatening Iraqi state. *The end was never in question: remove the regime*. Correctly balancing mass, surprise, and sustained operations kept ways and means entirely interrelated. (Bush stated) ‘These are the opening stages of what will be a broad and concerted campaign.’<sup>29</sup>

Commanders drew a line on their maps from Kuwait City, through American camps in northern Kuwait, then into Iraq, through Nasiriyah, to Diwaniyah, to Baghdad. The Army’s V Corps, under the command of Lieutenant General William Wallace (whose

marvelous name evoked the agile thirteenth-century Scottish freedom fighter of the same name) took the western side of that line. Their brothers in the First Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) took the east, commanded by Lieutenant General James Conway. Like Grant and Sherman splitting at the Mississippi and driving, individually, to reunite at their operational objective in Richmond, V Corps bid the Marines farewell in northern Kuwait and met them in Baghdad, 22 days and almost 500 miles later.

On March 19, 2003, American forces began a beautifully synchronized air-ground campaign across southern Mesopotamia, imposing their will, giving battle at the time and place of their choosing. The operation began with a “running start,” as mechanized infantry roared across the Iraq-Kuwait border 24 hours *early*. All emphasis was on speed. Marines stripped down vehicles into a “logistics light” configuration, leaving behind fuel, ammunition and food beyond a bare minimum. Doing so made for risky, bold operational logistics: lighter vehicles cut down on fuel requirements and the need for tires and parts, and gave operational commanders flexibility and freedom of movement. Throughout March 2003, and through mid-April, I MEF and V Corps forces bypassed villages and cities in which they could have been bogged down in fighting, shooting their way out as needed but simply traversing offroad as necessary, pushing hard, focused on their objective.

Such a strategy, well-briefed and understood, served two purposes. First, the soldiers and Marines kept their combined-arms team intact, taking infantry, aviation, tracked vehicles, tanks and artillery with them. Conway and Wallace refused to dilute their force by investing cities, as Sherman had been forced to do through the South in late 1864. Thus, when the Marines closed on their *operational objective* weeks later, all units were complete



and intact, and those commanders could bring to bear proper force. The Marine and Army commanders traded space for force and time.

Second, though the heavily-armed units rolled around or straight through these cities, the Iraqi units did not know more forces were not coming and froze in place. An Iraqi general observed that “(The U.S. Marines) did not fight in the cities...all the time Coalition convoys were moving north on the highways to Baghdad, while we were locked up.”<sup>30</sup> American operational commanders accepted the operational risk of exposed supply lines which extended further behind them daily, eventually covering almost 500 miles across wide-open terrain to Kuwait City. Operational logistics funded the Americans’ movement north as operational commanders traded force for time; the operational objective - investing Baghdad - and swift accomplishment of their goal was worth it.

V Corps conducted a sweeping road movement reminiscent of the Panzers at their best, leading with the Third Infantry Division, closing on their operational objective through a chokepoint across a single bridge at Karbala, to the west of Baghdad, and catching the Iraqi regime completely off guard. Wallace boldly ignored doctrine written for other wars. His feints to the north froze the Hussein regime in place, convincing Saddam and his top commanders that the true American attack would come from the north. He took a large force across completely exposed, open terrain in perfect weather, intentionally driving into a natural chokepoint between two lakes, depending on a single bridge (which the Iraqis had wired to explode.) He swept wide and then drove his force like a spike into downtown Baghdad. Conway was equally bold. Driving straight north, using roads as runways to refuel vehicles from aircraft, always pushing the timeline, he met Wallace on the objective. Both men used mission-type orders, swift and incisive (as evidenced by Wallace’s March 26

message to 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne CG, Major General Swannack, in pencil, hand-delivered: “Get your ass up here.”<sup>31)</sup>

Such are the operational successes bred by bold commanders oriented, then supported, but then left alone, by their civilian masters. The execution of total war, the exercise of the operational art by commanders given a clear mission, led to complete military victory in full-scale combat operations in Iraq. More important, they led to seizure of the tactical, operational, and strategic objective: the regime in Baghdad. As a senior Iraqi general reflected on the thick of the fight:

I told them (Saddam’s) plan was the opposite of what we were facing. I was told that I was not fighting the plan. This was incredible to me-the plan! What plan, I asked him. The Americans had wrecked our plan....It was the kind of arguments that I imagine took place in Hitler’s bunker in Berlin.<sup>32</sup>

## PHASE IV

The bold, decisive Washington leadership of 2003 has disappeared. Generals in 2003, standing in Baghdad, flush with victory, were “instructed essentially not to worry about nation building...a shockingly inaccurate analysis of the situation.”<sup>33</sup> One Army historian observed that though soldiers and Marines had dominated the battlefield in Phase III,

there was no Phase Four plan. While there may have been ‘plans’ at the national level, none of these ‘plans’ operationalized the problem beyond regime collapse.<sup>34</sup>

Now, years later, handed the faltering Phase IV fight, General Petraeus does not know how to determine when he has succeeded. Operational commanders in 2003 defeated *men*: soldiers, military officers, regime leaders. The operational commander now is to defeat *ideas*: terrorism, and insurgency. Petraeus is fighting a concept, not an army; a belief system, not a regime. This belief system has no center of gravity, and thus cannot be defeated and will never culminate. A belief system can only be defeated by total national will: nuanced,

coherent and sequenced. George Bush wants it defeated with guns. Such is the mistake when war is declared against ideology, as an analyst wryly observed:

Wars have typically been fought against proper nouns (Germany, say) for the good reason that proper nouns can surrender and promise not to do it again. Wars against common nouns (poverty, crime, drugs) have been less successful. Such opponents never give up. *The war on terrorism*, unfortunately, falls into the second category.<sup>35</sup>

In 1971, an Army officer, veteran of years of heavy combat in Vietnam, stated plainly that America failed in the “Vietnamization” of the war for the simple fact that “the South Vietnamese really didn’t think the Americans were ever going to leave.”<sup>36</sup> Such analysis could be applied to the Iraqi Army, which is emotionally at sea without the iron hand of the only ruler they ever knew, and which looks askance at the Americans as they swear impending withdrawal while building enormous logistics infrastructure. As American advisors anxiously hold the hands of the protean Iraqi force, the insurgency quietly gains strength, ebbing and flowing, building force, trading space away to the Americans for the unlimited time in which an insurgency thrives. A “surge” of 30,000-plus troops appears to have made “some hitherto anarchic areas less so”<sup>37</sup> and has driven the insurgency to ground...but that is where an insurgency *wants* to be. Insurgency expert David Kilcullen warns that an Islamic insurgency “draw(s) its foot soldiers from deprived groups, and their leadership from alienated elites.”<sup>38</sup> In current Iraq, there are plenty of both.

## **STARS ON THE TABLE**

General Petraeus is a bold, insightful operational commander, “the closest thing the Army has to Lawrence of Arabia,”<sup>39</sup> and like Lawrence he has an unusually intuitive understanding of counterinsurgent warfare. His military success is indeed impressive in places like al-Anbar Province. As a Marine officer there noted last week, “there were fewer

engagements for the entire last twenty days then (sic) there were during a single eight-hour shift eight months ago,” but added, “we still have a lot of work to do politically in Baghdad.”<sup>40</sup> Like Grant, Petraeus faces an armed, disenfranchised, hostile population. Like Grant, he must invest cities and leave a portion of his force to defend them. Like Grant, he must contend with an exhausted, frustrated, impatient populace at home. Like Ridgway, he is far from home, handed a losing cause, and told to turn it around by a President with record-low approval numbers and no political chips to cash.

*What General Petraeus needs from President Bush is a clearly-defined national strategic end state. He must, quietly, demand such guidance.* If he does not get it, he must follow the advice put forward by former CENTCOM commander General Anthony Zinni:

If you want that fourth star, you owe an obligation to the American people to give them your honest view, even if it contradicts administration policy. You’d better deliver when the time comes. The decision comes how to handle (Iraq.) What do you do? You put your stars on the table.<sup>41</sup>

General Ulysses S. Grant had a clear, defined operational objective on the way to a national strategic end state given to him by President Lincoln: reunite the Republic by defeating Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia in the field. General Matthew Ridgway had a clear, defined operational objective on the way to a national strategic end state given to him by President Truman: stop Communism and win the war in Korea by turning around the Eighth Army. General David Petraeus has been given neither operational objective nor national strategic end state, and thus the military fights alone. Retired Lieutenant General Richard Sanchez, who once held General Petraeus’s job, summarizes:

When a nation goes to war *it must bring to bear all elements of power* in order to win...this administration has failed to employ and synchronize its political, economic and military power. There was an unfortunate display of incompetent *strategic* leadership (which) continues to believe that victory can be achieved by military power alone. America has not been fully committed to win this war.<sup>42</sup>

## Notes

1. Milan Vego, *Operational Warfare* (Newport: Naval War College, 2004), 593.
2. Ibid, xiv.
3. Mark Berger and Douglas Borer, "The Long War: Insurgency, Counterinsurgency and Collapsing States," *Third World Quarterly*, (Volume 28, Number 2, 2007), 209. For further discussion of counterinsurgency and its unique challenges for the American operational commander, see Bernard Fall, *Street Without Joy* and *Last Reflections on a War*. For American mistakes clearly, and harshly, defined, see Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*.
4. David Barno, "Challenges in Fighting a Global Insurgency," *Parameters*, (Volume 36, Issue 2, Summer 2006), 5.
5. Shelby Foote, *The Civil War, A Narrative. Red River to Appomattox*, (New York: Random House, 1974), 7. Foote quotes Lincoln's speech on the steps of the White House, declaring Grant his new commander, 9 March 1864.
6. Vego, 596.
7. Abraham Lincoln, quoted in editorial, *The New York Times*, August 6, 1862. In that time many articles were written without authors noted; readers were to assume that an article represented the work of the paper's staff.
8. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 616. Goodwin quotes Grant from his memoirs; see also Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant*, (New York: Charles Webster and Co, 1886), 536.
9. Foote, 13. Foote's three-volume series is widely considered the final word, apart from Lincoln's and Grant's own memoirs, on their interactions during what then seemed the darkest days of the Civil War. Douglas Southall Freeman serves this purpose on the Confederate side. See Foote for further discussion of the thinking of both Grant and Lincoln.
10. Grant, 425, 556.
11. Douglas Southall Freeman, *Lee's Lieutenants: A Study in Command*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), xxv.
12. Foote, 24.
13. Grant, 557.

14. Foote, 16 and 30. Also, see Goodwin for a particularly insightful discussion of this point in history, with more focus on Lincoln. It is significant that Lincoln was facing reelection as Grant was driving through the South. Lincoln's unstinting support for Grant, his bravery and grit, are the more impressive when the reader understands that Lincoln's *own* career hung in the balance

15. Ibid, 23.

16. Roy Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Volumes VII and VIII*, (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 393.

17. Basler, 453.

18. David McCullough, *Truman* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 831. McCullough here quotes Omar Bradley's observation of Ridgway.

19. General Matthew Ridgway, *Soldier: The Memoirs of General Matthew B. Ridgway*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), 199.

20. McCullough, 832.

21. Ibid, 192.

22. Ibid, 207.

23. Ridgway, 201.

24. McCullough.

25. Ibid, 835.

26. Ibid, 837. McCullough is the source for insight into the machinations in the White House, as Truman grew to realize that Ridgway was a man to trust, while MacArthur was not. Truman would sacrifice his career for American fighting boys first, and Ridgway second, but he sure as hell would not do so for the insubordinate, deified MacArthur. Showing the damn-the-consequences style for which he is now revered, Truman ended up firing MacArthur and putting Ridgway in his place. McCullough won the Pulitzer Prize for this book.

27. Ibid, 834.

28. Brigadier General James Mattis, USMC, Commander, First Marine Division, speech at Ali-al-Salem Air Base, Kuwait, 6 February 2003. This speech was part of a 1<sup>st</sup> Marine

Division-3d Marine Air Wing fire support coordination meeting, quickly nicknamed “The FAC Summit,” which pulled together all Marine officers in all fire support roles from throughout the Kuwait theater prior to the war. The author was in attendance and copied down Mattis’s comments in a journal. The author has a book in progress, working title *Rough Men Stand Ready*, about the war; this quote will feature prominently in that book, as will Mattis.

29. Colonel Gregory Fontenot U.S. Army, editor, *On Point: The United States Army in Iraqi Freedom*, (Fort Leavenworth: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2004), 46, 86.

30. Kevin Woods, *The Iraqi Perspective Project 2006*. (Suffolk: United States Joint Forces Command, 2006), 141.

31. *On Point*, 211.

32. Woods, 144, 148.

33. Berger and Borer, 210.

34. Tom Ricks, “Army Historian Cites Lack of Postwar Plan.” *Washington Post*, 25 December, 2004, A10.

35. Grenville Byford, “The Wrong War,” *Foreign Affairs*, 81 (July/August 2002), as quoted in Mitchell Thompson, “Breaking the Proconsulate: a New Design for National Power,” *Parameters*, (Winter 2005-2006), 64.

36. David H. Hackworth, Colonel U.S. Army (Retired), *About Face*, (New York: Touchstone Books, 1989), 710.

37. George Will, “A War Still Seeking a Mission.” *Washington Post*, 11 September, 2007, A17.

38. David Kilcullen, “Countering Global Insurgency,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, (August 2005), 603.

39. Tom Barnett, “The Monks of War,” *Esquire* (March 2006), 7.

40. Lieutenant Colonel Cason Heard, USMC, Electronic mail to the author, 20 October 2007. LTCOL Heard is a CH-53E pilot presently deployed with a squadron to al-Asad Air Base in Iraq. He was a 3d Marine Wing Air Wing Battle Captain in 2005-2006 and thus had a front-row seat, literally, to the entire First Marine Division/3d Marine Air Wing AOR during 2005 and 2006.

41. General Anthony C. Zinni, USMC (Retired,) “From the Batttlefield to the Negotiating Table,” 15 April 2004. Speech and personal interview as part of the Joan Kroc Distinguished Lecture Series at the University of San Diego. General Zinni’s comment about a general’s putting stars on the table was said directly to the author during a private breakfast, and was transcribed into proceedings of the event.

42. Daniel Henninger, “General Sanchez’s Scream,” *Wall Street Journal* (18 October 2007), A16. See also David Cloud in the *New York Times*, 12 October, 2007, who reported on the same speech.



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